

[A C H EASLAW]

The Basis of Reunion According to the Lambeth Conference.

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I think it should be stated that in all conferences for Christian re-union appointed by the Church of England at the present time, the basis for our negotiations is to be the principles laid down by the Lambeth Conference. It would be convenient therefore if I state clearly what the Lambeth Conference has laid down.

Lambeth Conference, 1888.

The basis of our negotiations is what has been called the Lambeth Quadrilateral, which was defined at the Lambeth Conference, 1888.

(a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

(b) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

(c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord—ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.

(d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

Lambeth Conference, 1897.

In the Conference of 1897 these resolutions were re-affirmed by the Committee on Unity, which added the following:

It may be well for us to state why we are unable to concede more.

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We believe that we have been Providentially entrusted with our part of the Catholic and Apostolic inheritance bequeathed by our Lord, and that not only for ourselves, but for the millions who speak our language in every land—possibly for humanity at large.

This quality of our Church we cannot forget and dare not annul. We feel we should not be justified in placing “new barriers between ourselves and the ancient historical Churches.” Nor, in a different direction, do we believe in mere rhetorical calls to unity. Nor would we surrender in return for questionable benefits the very elements of the peculiar strength and attractiveness of our own system—its quiet adherence to truth, its abstinence from needless innovation, its backbone of historical continuity. We cannot barter away any part of our God-given trust, because we feel that such action would involve an amount of future loss and forfeiture which we cannot estimate at the moment.

Lambeth Conference, 1920.

In the Conference of 1920 an appeal for unity to all Christian people was issued. In that appeal it was stated:

The vision which rises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all “who profess and call themselves Christians,” within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ. Within this unity Christian Communion now separated from one another would retain much that has long been distinctive in their methods of worship and service. It is through a rich diversity of life and devotion that the unity of the whole fellowship will be fulfilled.

The Lambeth Quadrilateral was re-affirmed in somewhat different language:

We believe that the visible unity of the Church will be found to involve the whole-hearted acceptance of:—

The Holy Scriptures, as the record of God’s revelation of Himself to man, and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith; and the Creed commonly called Nicene.

as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith, and either it or the Apostles' Creed as the Baptismal confession of belief :

The divinely instituted sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion, as expressing for all the corporate life of the whole fellowship in and with Christ :

A ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body.

And the next resolution explains this as follows :—

May we not reasonably claim that the Episcopate is the one means of providing such a ministry? It is not that we call in question for a moment the spiritual reality of the ministries of those Communion which do not possess the Episcopate. On the contrary we thankfully acknowledge that these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace. But we submit that considerations alike of history and of present experience justify the claim which we make on behalf of the Episcopate. Moreover, we would urge that it is now and will prove to be in the future the best instrument for maintaining the unity and continuity of the Church. But we greatly desire that the office of a Bishop should be everywhere exercised in a representative and constitutional manner, and more truly express all that ought to be involved for the life of the Christian Family in the title of Father-in-God. Nay more, we eagerly look forward to the day when through its acceptance in a united Church we may all share in that grace which is pledged to the members of the whole body in the apostolic rite of the laying-on of hands, and in the joy and fellowship of a Eucharist in which as one Family we may together, without any doubtfulness of mind, offer to the one Lord our worship and service.

Lambeth Conference, 1930.

Then finally in the Conference of 1930 the position was further elucidated by the Committee on the Unity of the Church. We may quote the following paragraphs :

When we speak of the Historic Episcopate, we mean the Episcopate as it emerged in the clear light of history from the time when definite evidence begins to be available.

It is not a mere fact, but an institution fulfilling certain purposes. As an institution it was, and is, characterised by succession in two forms: the succession in office and the succession of consecration. And it had generally recognised functions: the general superintendence of the Church and more especially of the Clergy; the maintenance of unity in the one Eucharist; the ordination of men to the ministry; the safeguarding of the faith; and the administration of the discipline of the Church. There have been different interpretations of the relation of these elements in the Historic Episcopate to one another; but the elements themselves are constant. When, therefore, we say that we must insist on the Historic Episcopate but not upon any theory or interpretation of it, we are not to be understood as insisting on the office apart from the functions. What we uphold is the Episcopate, maintained in successive generations by continuity of succession and consecration, as it has been throughout the history of the Church from the earliest times, and discharging those functions which from the earliest times it has discharged.

And then it repeats the statement about non-episcopal communions:

In laying this emphasis on our own inheritance, we emphatically declare that we do not call in question the spiritual reality of the ministries now exercised in non-episcopal communions. On the contrary, we reiterate the declaration of the Lambeth Conference of 1920, that "these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace." But when we consider the problem which must be paramount in all our discussions, namely, the restoration of the broken unity of Christ's Body and the drawing together of the separated groups of His followers, we realise that one necessary element in that visible fellowship must be a ministry universally acknowledged. Thus considered, there is at present, no ministry which fully corresponds with the purpose of God. Yet we are persuaded that the historic continuity of the episcopal ministry provides evidence of the Divine intention in this respect such as to constitute a stewardship which we are bound to discharge.

It may be convenient to add to this review some explanation of the teaching of the Anglican Church.

The Holy Scriptures.

The teaching of the Church of England on the Scriptures is contained in the VI. Article :

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation : so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

As to the canon of Scripture, it says : " In the name of the holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church." But the Church of England recognises in a subordinate position the Books of what is commonly called the Apocrypha, "and the other Books, as Hierome said the Church doth read for example, but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine."

The Authority of the Church.

As regards the authority of the Church, it states in the XX. Article : " The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith." And then it adds : " Although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation."

Traditions of the Church.

As regards the traditions of the Church in Article 34, it is stated : " It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like. Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church," but it condemns any who "through his private judgment willingly and purposely openly break the traditions of the Church which be not repugnant to the Word of God."

The Creed.

As regards the Creed, the intention of the Lambeth Conferences has been that the fundamental doctrine of the Faith as contained in the Creeds are sufficient basis for reunion. As regards the secondary formulæ of Christianity such as The Articles of Religion, the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, such as the Confession of Augsburg, and so on, the attitude may be that each Church may preserve its own formulæ as the declaration of its basis of doctrine, but that no Church should seek to impose its own particular Confessions on other Churches.

The Sacraments.

The Church of England and the Anglican communion consider that there are two Sacraments only generally necessary for salvation. Other ordinances of religion—Confirmation, Penance, Orders and Matrimony—are sometimes called Sacraments in a secondary sense, but are not looked upon as Sacraments of the Gospel. But their value in all cases is recognised, and they are looked upon as a means by which the Grace of God's Holy Spirit is given in the Church. The ordinance of extreme unction has died out in the Church, but attempts are being made in some quarters to revive it.

As regards the doctrine of the Church of England on Baptism and the Holy Communion, it has never been accurately defined, and that appears to many of us a very great advantage. The Articles condemn Transubstantiation and Zwinglianism, and say that the Body and Blood of Christ are received in a spiritual manner. For the rest, the teaching must be found in the Prayer Book. Perhaps the most significant statement is: "The Body and Blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper." (In the Catechism.)

The Historic Episcopate.

The meaning of the historic episcopate as interpreted by the Church of England is contained in the Preface to the Ordinal. It may be summed up as follows:—

1. That all Ministers of the Church should be consecrated or ordained by prayer with the laying on of hands.

2. That every Bishop should be consecrated by three Bishops, as is laid down in the Council of Nicaea. It has, however, been generally held that one Bishop is sufficient for a valid consecration.

3. That Priests or Presbyters and Deacons should always be ordained by a Bishop.

It may be noted that no theory of the ministry is laid down, and that no doctrine of Apostolic succession appears in the formularies of the Church.

The point of view of the Church of England with regard to re-union may be studied in the negotiations with the Church of Sweden, the Orthodox Eastern Church, the Old Catholics, the Church of Finland, and in the statement of the Lambeth Conference with regard to the scheme for re-union in South India. There are separate publications with regard to the Orthodox Church, the Old Catholics, and the Church of Finland.